

**Texas Department of Health
Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health
August 17, 2001**

Lab Building. Wall framing is complete through five floors; window glass installation is almost complete; sheetrock tape and float for the first floor is 95% complete, and lab casework (benches) for the first and second floors have been delivered. The Texas Department of Health (TDH) will assume costs for construction utilities, estimated at approximately \$150,000. *For more information contact Tim Horn, Lab Office/Building Project, (512) 458-7780 or e-mail tim.horn@tdh.state.tx.us.*

PeopleSoft. Phase I financial implementation is in the final stage, and systems training has begun. The technical infrastructure issues have been resolved for deployment of the PeopleSoft application, scheduled for September 4. Production readiness reviews are made bi-weekly to ensure that all issues are being addressed on time. In the second phase of implementation, human resources directors from Health and Human Services Commission agencies will meet regularly to discuss standardization of policies and procedures across agencies, as differences are identified from work group sessions. *For more information contact Linda Schirpik, Administrative Systems Project, (512) 458-7503 or e-mail linda.schirpk@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Campus Security. The primary security system contract has been awarded calling for the installation of internal and external cameras on the main campus, a swipe card type employee identification system and a security system for the new lab building. The security guard station at the main entrance will be reconfigured to house a monitoring station for security cameras. *For more information contact John Burlinson, Resource Management, (512) 458-7738 or e-mail john.burlinson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Consolidated Applicant Intake Center. A consolidated applicant intake center for Texas Health and Human Services Commission agencies will be located on the first floor of TDH's Moreton Building. The Health and Human Services Human Resources Council met August 1 to complete the Memorandums of Understanding and decide on the name for the center, the marketing plan, and office processes. The center's grand opening is September 10. *For more information contact Sharon Brewer, Human Resources, (512) 458-7111, ext. 6138 or e-mail sharon.brewer@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Houston Hospitals Disaster and Recovery. The Houston area has experienced a severe shortage of hospital beds since the June flooding caused by Tropical Storm Allison and the resulting closure of several major hospitals. The Health Facility Licensing and Compliance Division has been assisting flood-damaged hospitals by issuing waivers to current rules so the hospitals can continue to operate. Health Facility Licensing and Compliance Division staff toured the flooded medical center areas along with hospital staff, their engineers and others to assess the damage. The facilities received information about the minimum acceptable criteria for re-establishment of services, such as emergency generators and electrical systems, air systems, medical gas systems, and fire alarm sprinkler systems. TDH staff is continuing on-site visits, at the request of the facilities, to ensure that patient safety is maintained during ongoing demolition and construction processes and that newly rehabilitated areas are safe for patient occupancy. At least eight hospital systems in the Houston area were damaged in the flooding. Seven of the eight

hospitals have re-established emergency and surgical services; however, a few areas remain that need further renovation. Only one hospital, Houston Regional Medical Center, remains closed; but it is scheduled to reopen in 60 to 90 days. In addition, the central office and regional office staff members were asked by the TDH Emergency Preparedness Committee to contact more than 185 hospitals in some 60 counties concerning their bed availability in the event that the major hospitals needed to transfer patients to other facilities. One large hospital had to transfer more than 400 patients because of the flooding. *For more information contact Becky Berryhill, Licensing and Compliance, (512) 834-4503 or e-mail becky.berryhill@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Conference on Juvenile Sex Offenders. The 9th Annual Conference on the Treatment and Supervision of Juvenile Sex Offenders occurred July 20-22 in Austin. Approximately 225 professionals from various disciplines attended. Presentation topics included management of juvenile sex offenders, treatment program outcomes, and other issues dealing with sex offenders and victims. *For more information contact Janet Latham, Sex Offender Treatment, (512) 834-4530 or e-mail janet.latham@tdh.state.tx.us.*

2001 Regional Vital Statistics Conferences. The Bureau of Vital Statistics co-sponsored Regional Vital Statistics Conferences in Laredo, Galveston, and Arlington this year with the Texas Public Health Association. Attendees included employees from hospitals and funeral homes, justices of the peace, local registrars, and midwives. Session topics included birth, death, and fetal death registration; paternity in birth registration; amendments to birth and death records; and filing, access, and issuance of vital records. *For more information contact Raymond Andrews, Vital Statistics, (512) 458-7505 or e-mail raymond.andrews@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Vital Statistics Customer Service Survey. The 2000 Bureau of Vital Statistics Customer Service Survey is complete. Results, which have been analyzed and compared with those of the 1998 survey, will be used to help enhance services. *For more information contact Raymond Andrews, Vital Statistics, (512) 458-7505 or e-mail raymond.andrews@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Abandoned Radioactive Storage Site. In July, the Bureau of Radiation Control, in partnership with the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Superfund Division, completed the remediation of an abandoned radioactive storage site in Odessa. Radiation Control staff is working with the Office of the Attorney General in their 1993 suit brought against the owners, operators, and waste generators associated with the site. Funding for interim site security comes from the TNRCC Hazardous and Solid Waste Remediation Fee Fund and proceeds from partial settlement of the lawsuit. TDH is providing assistance to the EPA and the Attorney General's Office to recover the response and site remediation costs, a sum exceeding \$1.2 million. *For more information contact Mike Dunn, Radiation Control, (512) 834-6688 or e-mail mike.dunn@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Perinatal HIV Transmission. TDH staff attended the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs' Action Learning Lab on perinatal HIV transmission issues. Staff from the TDH bureaus of Women's Health and HIV/STD Prevention, the Public Health Region 4/5 North Director, and a Houston obstetrician participated in the lab July 25 and 26 in Washington, D.C. They reviewed data about perinatal HIV transmission, met with representatives from seven other states, reviewed the situation in Texas, and began

developing a three-part project. This project includes a public awareness campaign, a review and presentation of data in a way that will be useful to various stakeholders, and the development of a provider consultation network. The team will collaborate with internal and external stakeholders over the next six months to further develop and implement this project. *For more information contact Chan McDermott, Perinatal Health, (512) 458-7796 or e-mail chan.mcdermott@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Medically Dependent Children Program Transfer. As required by Senate Bill 374, 76th Texas Legislature, the Medically Dependent Children Program will transfer from TDH to the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS) September 1. TDH and DHS staff met monthly for the last year to ensure a smooth transition. Nine central office and 22 regional office positions will transfer to DHS to administer the program. *For more information contact Susan Penfield, MD, Children with Special Health Care Needs (512) 458-7111, ext. 3104 or e-mail susan.penfield@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 1

New Director. Nicolas Curry, MD, MPH, is the new Director of Public Health Region 1. Dr. Curry comes to TDH from the CCA Health Systems Adviser in Manor, Texas, where he served as the Principal. Dr. Curry also served as the Director for the public health departments in Tarrant County and Fort Worth, as a communicable disease consultant for TDH and as the Chief of Clinical Services and the Chief of Quality Assessment and Continuing Education for the City of Houston Health and Human Services Department. Dr. Curry holds a medical degree from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and a master's in public health from the University of Alabama in Birmingham. *For more information contact Scott Slemmons, Region 1, (806) 767-0482 or e-mail scott.slemmons@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Shigella Outbreak. Epidemiology staff investigated a shigella outbreak in Shamrock in mid-June. The index case was a 28-year-old female with onset date in late May. She worked in a local restaurant and operated an in-home child-care center, where she took care of six youngsters. Four of the children were laboratory confirmed and treated. Two children were asymptomatic; however, they also were treated because of contact. The outbreak was confined to the child-care center; no shigella cases were linked to restaurant customers. *For more information contact Barry Wilson, Region 1, (806) 767-0496 or e-mail barry.wilson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 2/3

Foodborne Illness. Region 2/3 staff investigated a foodborne illness outbreak at a camp in Wise County in July. About 70 of 175 high school-age campers at a church retreat became ill with nausea, cramps, and other symptoms two days after arriving. Regional general sanitation inspectors examined the kitchen and other facilities, while epidemiology staff conducted a food recall survey and gathered specimens. The survey implicated a salad dressing made on-site. Stool cultures by the Bureau of Laboratories found no bacterial pathogen. There was considerable evidence of secondary transmission of disease in the camp after the outbreak peaked. *For more information contact Brad Walsh, Region 2/3, (817) 264-4551 or e-mail brad.walsh@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Hepatitis A Notification and Response. A food service worker at a Sonic restaurant in Seymour was diagnosed with hepatitis A. Region 2/3 issued a news release advising patrons who ate at the restaurant on specific dates to seek an immune globulin injection to prevent infection. TDH staff inspected the restaurant, interviewed restaurant staff, and worked at the local hospital clinic set up to offer the injection. Sonic Corporation supplied the immune globulin for the clinic at no cost to patrons. *For more information contact Brad Walsh, Region 2/3, (817) 264-4551 or e-mail brad.walsh@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Boil Water Notice. The City of Keene water department received unsatisfactory lab test results on its source water Friday, July 27, and issued a boil water notice to all residents. TDH worked with the Keene Police Department to handle the volume of calls that resulted over the weekend requesting information on the necessary precautions to take. The notice was rescinded the following Tuesday. *For more information contact Brad Walsh, Region 2/3, (817) 264-4551 or e-mail brad.walsh@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Rabies-infected Kitten. A TDH news release issued July 5 notified the public of a potential rabies threat from kittens given away in a Wal-Mart parking lot in Lancaster July 2. One kitten from the litter, kept by the family because it was ill, was diagnosed with rabies on July 3; and there was a high risk that the six kittens given away also had been exposed to rabies. Region 2/3 Zoonosis Control staff was notified about the rabies-infected kitten on July 4, and the following day Lancaster Police Department notices and the TDH news release about the kittens were distributed throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. News media coverage was extensive, and by July 6 all the kittens had been located. The TDH Laboratory tested the six kittens for rabies, with negative results. Region 2/3 staff contacted everyone who was considered exposed, and 11 people received rabies post-exposure treatment. *For more information contact Connie Lindley, Region 2/3, (817) 264-4921 or e-mail connie.lindley@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 6/5 South

Cluster of Histoplasmosis Ruled Out. On July 11, Region 6/5 South received a report of a possible cluster of histoplasmosis among students from Montgomery County who had recently visited Mexico. Regional epidemiologists investigated, arranging for a blood specimen to be sent to the TDH Laboratory. Based on the investigation and negative result of the specimen, this case is not considered to be a cluster of histoplasmosis, which is a disease caused by a fungus that primarily affects the lungs. *For more information contact Huai Lin, Region 6/5S, (713) 767-3232 or e-mail huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Oral Health Curriculum. On July 18, dental program staff educated school nurses at the Belle Blackwell School Nurse's Conference in Houston. Materials were displayed that will be featured in the upcoming "By the Roots" educational program available to public schools through the Division of Oral Health. Educational materials for younger age groups also were shown, and free educational packets were distributed to participants. *For more information contact William Gray, Region 6/5S, (713) 767-3471 or e-mail william.gray@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Children's Health Insurance Program Telethon. Two Region 6/5 South staff members volunteered for a telethon for CHIP, the Children's Health Insurance Program, on June 28. The telethon was coordinated by area CHIP community-based organizations including the Episcopal Health Charities, Families Under Urban and Social Attack, Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services, and Hope Worldwide. The Gulf Coast CHIP Coalition was a sponsor and provided lodging and food for participants. Two local television stations, NBC Channel 2 and Spanish-language Univision Channel 45, aired the telethon. More than 7,000 application requests came from viewers. *For more information contact Anita Garvey, Region 6/5S, (713) 767-3195 or e-mail anita.garvey@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Child Seat Safety. From March through May, Region 6/5 South worked in partnership with the Greater Houston Coalition for SAFEKIDS to educate people about the proper installation and use of child passenger safety seats. Members of the coalition include Texas Children's Center for Childhood Injury Prevention, state and local police departments, and local agriculture extension agents. Safety seat checkups occurred in Tomball, Spring, Galveston, Lake Jackson, Cypresswood, and Humble. Of the 321 child passenger seats checked, 293 were incorrectly installed and 68 of the seats checked had been recalled or were considered unsafe. While 21 children came to the event completely unrestrained, 98 new child safety seats were given out. The safety seats were provided by the Texas Children's Center for Childhood Injury through a grant they received from TDH. *For more information contact Tammy Dwight, Region 6/5S, (713) 767-3030 or e-mail tammy.dwight@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 7

Texas Health Steps. Central Office has identified the Region 7 Texas Health Steps Program as having implemented an innovative and successful "Best Practice" effort. This effort includes monthly meetings to review, discuss, and clarify the Texas Medicaid Provider Procedures Manual, Texas Medicaid Service Delivery Guide, and current Medicaid Bulletin. This team effort helps ensure that regional medical, dental, and case management providers get accurate, updated information regarding the program. *For more information contact Eileen Walker, Region 7, (254) 778-6744 or e-mail eileen.walker@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Bastrop County Parade. Region 7 entered a truck, decorated with a fruit and vegetable theme, in the Bastrop County homecoming parade. A local grocery store donated fresh fruit to be distributed along the parade route, and fast food nutritional information was passed out along with squeezable fruits. The parade entry won second prize for most original entry and third prize for best nonprofit entry. *For more information contact Lisa McKamie, Region 7, (254) 778-6744 or e-mail lisa.mckamie@tdh.state.tx.us.*

EMS Training with Temple Junior College. In July, the Immunization Division provided Temple Junior College paramedic students with eight hours of training on immunizations for health care professionals. Region 7 and Temple Junior College have partnered with Scott and White Hospital to rotate paramedic students through their pediatric clinic. The goal of this program is to partner paramedics with school nurses to immunize students in school-based clinics. *For more information contact Lynn Ponsonby, Region 7, (254) 778-6744, ext. 2423 or e-mail lynn.ponsonby@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 9/10

Public Hearings. The Permian Basin Planning Commission and United Way of El Paso hosted Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) public hearings in Midland and El Paso in July. The hearings gave the HHSC and state agencies the opportunity to receive local stakeholder input. Region 9/10 participated actively in planning the hearings. Issues pertaining to local communication, collaboration, and health care access predominated the hearing discussions. *For more information contact Gale Morrow, Region 9/10, (915) 834-7777 or e-mail gale.morrow@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Blood Drive. Region 9/10 and United Blood Services coordinated a successful blood drive among state agency employees with more than 200 units of blood collected. This blood drive was held in response to a blood shortage in West Texas and a challenge from State Senator Elliot Shapleigh. *For more information contact Hilda Chavarria, Region 9/10, (915) 834-7699 or e-mail hilda.chavarria@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 11

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant. Region 11 assisted in bringing together community health clinics and the Texas A&M School of Rural Public Health for a grant application to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Health Resource and Service Administration. The proposed \$1 million project — for integrated health outreach to isolated colonia residents in Hidalgo County — seeks to decrease isolation and improve access to care through use of promotoras. *For more information contact Brian Smith, MD, Region 11, (956) 423-0130 or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Border Governors' Conference. On June 6, the regional director participated in the XIX Border Governors' Conference. Participants, including representatives from ten state health departments, completed three priority areas for border public health. The top priority was a border communication system among health departments for alerts, surveillance, and coordination of binational projects. In addition, conference participants decided to develop a common data set to standardize indicators for binational health outcome planning. A recommendation to consider mortality related to drugs as a public health issue on the border with appropriate academic studies also was made. *For more information contact Brian Smith, MD, Region 11, (956) 423-0130 or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Environmental Health on the Border. On June 14, the regional director attended a workshop on environmental risks conducted by The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Public Health, with faculty from around the United States. The discussion focused on major environmental concerns on the border and improving health risk communication in preparation for environmental events. *For more information contact Brian Smith, MD, Region 11, (956) 423-0130 or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*